Newsletter of the DOE Electronic Proposal Management Application (ePMA) project

Project Name Changes to
Electronic Proposal Management Application (ePMA)

ePME has a new name! Effectively immediately, we are the Department of Energy's Electronic Proposal Management Application (ePMA).

"We changed the name to ePMA because Electronic Proposal Management Application better reflects the present scope and purpose of the project than the E-Government Corporate R&D Portfolio Management Environment (ePME) project, and we now have a working system with operational data well into production," explained Vince Dattoria of DOE's Office of Science, the ePMA project manager.

The project Web site address has changed to http://epma.energy.gov, although those who visit the former site (http://epme.doe.gov) will be routed to the new site.

The address of the ePMA system/application is being changed to https://epma.doe.gov, though users who access the system via the present site (https://epme.energy.gov) will be routed to the new site for a limited period of time. The content of the application site will not change until the next release, scheduled for December. Once the changes have been made to the system Web site, please update any bookmarks you have for the old addresses.

The ePMA name will be used going forward. We don't plan to change the project name on previously published newsletters, presentations and other materials. However, we have changed the name on forms used by Site Administration Managers and system users, such as the Software Change Request form, User Assistance Request form, and other forms (http://epma.energy.gov/samcentral/sam_resources.asp).

Based on the original CME (Corporate R&D Portfolio Management Environment) Final Business Case in August 2000, the project was first envisioned to support a set of R&D program management processes, including the receipt and review of proposals, program guidance and work authorization, portfolio and project management, and project tracking and reporting.

Budget considerations have mandated that we improve the efficiency and effectiveness of DOE's research and development programs by concentrating on an application for the electronic receipt, review, and tracking of R&D proposals from the National Laboratories. An updated system release, scheduled for December, will incorporate approved Software Change Requests and enhanced functionality explained in the following article.

The ePMA project team will continue to develop and expand the system during 2006. We welcome additional Software Change Requests from Site Administration Managers, which we will review for incorporation in subsequent system releases. And, we are always pleased to receive our stakeholders' comments and suggestions for system improvements.

Scope of the ePMA December Release

The next release of the ePMA application is scheduled for December 2005. Based on feedback from users, ranging from National Laboratory and Site Office staff to Headquarters program managers, this release will include several enhancements, including approved Software Change Requests (SCRs), the addition of a proposal copy function, functionality for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EE) users, and the ability of program managers to add guidance information to approved proposals.

SCRs
As users have become familiar with the ePMA system, some have recommended changes for improved functionality. These recommendations are passed along to the ePMA Joint Change Control Board (JCCB) by the Site Administration Managers (SAMs), via the Software Change Request (SCR) form (http://epma.energy.gov/samcentral/sam_resources.asp). The JCCB recently approved 37 SCRs for incorporation in the December release. Here are just a few them:

- Users will have the ability to assign a single workflow team to multiple proposals.

- The task list will be sortable by all or selected column headings.

- Users will have the ability to input the actual start date of a project on the Admin Information page, even if the actual start date is earlier than the budget year.

- E-mail notifications will have a more detailed description of the referenced proposal. Information may include, but is not limited to, the following: ePMA in the heading, proposal number, proposal long title, laboratory, and principal investigator.

We invite ePMA users and SAMs to continue submitting SCRs.

Copy Function
Capability will be added for a user to copy and save one or multiple proposals at the same time. When a proposal is copied, however, all signatures and their dates will be omitted from the copy, and proposal attachments will not be copied. Users with only view and/or edit rights will not be able to copy proposals.

Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EE) Functionality
ePMA is being modified to include fields used by EE to manage agreements in its Corporate Planning System (CPS). We are working to address the systems' workflow and fields compatibility. Ultimately, the laboratories will conduct business with EE via the CPS agreement structure, which will be conveyed to EE/CPS via ePMA.

Funding Guidance
Program managers at Headquarters will be able to input funding guidance (such as B&R code, certification text, and narrative) for one or more of a laboratory's proposals. Headquarters users will be able to input as many of the funding guidance fields as necessary for their business processes, but the information will not be mandatory for approval of the proposal. All Headquarters users who are in the workflow for the funding guidance may edit the guidance, but it will be locked for editing when it leaves Headquarters. Once the proposal is approved, an ePMA user with read rights will be able to view and print the guidance.

Thank you to everyone who suggested ways to improve the ePMA system. Our objective is to make your proposal transmittal more efficient and productive. By incorporating many of your ideas and adding more functionality, we hope to make your work more efficient and expand our user base.

ePMA Welcomes New Project Team Members

New Technical Manager

David Henderson has joined the ePMA project team as Technical Manager, replacing Greg Long. David is a Senior Information Specialist and Senior Advisor to DOE's Office of Scientific and Technical Information's Associate Director for Administration and Information Services. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh with an MS in Information Management, he has worked in the information technology field for 35 years. From 2001 through July 2005, Mr. Henderson worked for Eli Lilly and Company, establishing programs for information protection and information privacy. While at Eli Lilly, he also managed a group working on thesaurus development and related intranet search products.

New Project Management Associate

Cathy Dixon has joined the ePMA project team as a Project Management Associate. She is a Senior Information Specialist at DOE's Office of Scientific and Technical Information. Cathy has worked in the communications and technical support field for nine years and supported several organizations within the DOE Complex. Her work experience is varied and includes technical writing, graphic design, technical illustration, web design, and quality assurance.

OnPoint, Project Management Office Contractor, Leaves ePMA

OnPoint (formerly CSMi), the Project Management Office (PMO) contractor for ePMA, is transitioning off the project on September 30 due to a reduction in the funding and scope of the project, and because the system has reached an operations and maintenance mode. For three years, OnPoint provided consistent support for the project's management needs. As the PMO contractor, OnPoint became the hub connecting all of the participants, the ePMA federal team, development contractor, National Laboratories, Field/Site/Operations Offices, and Program Secretarial Offices. To meet the challenge of bringing together these key stakeholders, OnPoint provided management support in three primary areas: project management and oversight, communication and outreach, and executive management support.

OnPoint provided a myriad of project management and oversight activities such as EVMS (Earned Value Management System) reporting, OMB Exhibit 300 reporting, master schedule tracking, cyber security planning and reporting, risk management and reporting, and many other tasks necessary to keep ePMA on track. In addition, **Marcella Black** and other OnPoint staff assisted the federal team in ensuring compliance with appropriate guidelines and policies.

Because ePMA has many stakeholders, widely geographically dispersed, communication and outreach was a critical element for the project's success. Through **Dwayne Coryell**, OnPoint contributed a wealth of experience and innovation in establishing and maintaining stakeholder relationships. OnPoint's experience in developing corporate and project brands developed a high level of awareness and consistency to the ePMA identity. Behind the scenes, OnPoint also provided project style guides, designed communication and outreach strategy, and managed the ePMA Web site (epma.energy.gov).

OnPoint's forward thinking provided the necessary executive management support and the materials necessary for the Federal team to provide updates to the Executive Steering Committee and other DOE leadership, and to prepare budget defense information for OMB. OnPoint's **Mark Herrling** was responsible for most of the executive management activities. (continued)

By providing support in project management and oversight, communication and outreach, and executive management, OnPoint's efforts kept all the parts of the project working smoothly and efficiently. As Marcella Black, Dwayne Coryell and Mark Herrling transition off the ePMA project, we say **Thank You** for your hard work, and we wish you the best in your future endeavors.

Helpdesk Transitions to the Office of Science

If you've contacted the ePMA Helpdesk, you've no doubt received a prompt response from **Marny Griffin** (top photo) or **Amy Ngan**, who work for CSC, the ePMA development contractor. With much regret on everyone's part, Amy and Marny are no longer staffing the Helpdesk because our budget does not enable us to continue funding the Helpdesk at CSC.

As of September 21, Helpdesk services are being handled by Office of Science IT support staff, though Amy and Marny will be available as consultants to SC staff through September 30. To ensure an orderly transition, Marny, Amy, and Jeff Voivoda have been training SC staff.

The ePMA project team says **Thank You** to Amy and Marny for responding to more than 690 Helpdesk inquiries. We appreciate all you've done!

The SC support staff -- Kevin Campbell, Alefiah Hussain, David Nocket, and Theresa Zuzworsky -- look forward to answering your questions about the use of the ePMA system. Many thanks -- and best wishes -- to Amy and Marny!

The Helpdesk e-mail address has changed. All e-mails to the ePMA Helpdesk should be addressed to sc-epma@science.doe.gov. The epmesupport@hq.doe.gov address will completely go away, though e-mails addressed to it will be forwarded to the new address for a limited time. The Helpdesk phone number, 301-903-0007, will not change. The fax number for sending in New User Account forms will remain 301-903-4045. Helpdesk hours are from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm Eastern time, weekdays.

Post-Implementation Review Summary

From February through April 2005, the ePMA Project conducted a production test, which affirmed the system's ability to electronically route research and development proposals from National Laboratories to Headquarters Program Secretarial Offices (PSOs).

A limited number of programs, comprising a representative set of the Department's R&D portfolio, participated, using actual R&D proposals. During this period, National Laboratories, Field/Site/Operations Offices, and participating PSOs exercised the ePMA application end-to-end, from the submission of proposals through their final approval or declination by the program office. Principal investigators, technical reviewers, budget analysts, program managers, and top officials were involved in one or more aspects of the submission, review, and approval process.

Following the production test, ePMA conducted a Post-Implementation Review (PIR) to assess the effectiveness of the application in meeting the following objectives:

- Assist the R&D community in integrating ePMA with their current business processes for submitting, reviewing, and approving R&D proposals. (continued)

- Identify lessons learned and best practices to be applied to the FY 2006 deployment.

- Identify necessary changes to the components of the ePMA application for the next release of the system.

To conduct the PIR, the ePMA Project Management Office contractor developed an interview guide as a tool to assess the policies, procedures, processes, and products of the production test that were established for the deployment, operations, and support of the ePMA application and user community. The areas covered by the interview guide included:

- Site Administration Manager (SAM) and end user training

- Account maintenance

- ePMA deployment

- User, system, and project (Web site) documentation

- Support infrastructure (SAMs and Helpdesk)

- DOE business process for receipt and review of proposals

- Change control

- Stakeholder communications

- Project management structure

- Overall assessment of the production test

The 12 questions in the interview guide were scored using the following scale:

> 5 – Outstanding
>
> 4 – Very Good
>
> 3 – Acceptable
>
> 2 – Needs Improvement
>
> 1 – Unacceptable
>
> NA – Not applicable

Interviewees were encouraged to discuss their scoring of each question and to provide specific feedback on the various elements of the production test.

Project team staff interviewed more than 25 key production test participants over several weeks. The interviewees included a representative set of PIR participants; 16 from National Laboratories, six from Site Offices, and six from PSOs. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Though the project team is still compiling the results of the PIR, which will be captured in an official PIR report scheduled for release at the end of October, preliminary scoring, feedback, and lessons learned from the PIR include the following:

- The average scoring across all questions of the interview was 3.5, between acceptable and very good. Many of those interviewed acknowledged the challenges associated with rolling out such an ambitious project across so many elements of the DOE complex and commented that the project performed surprisingly well given the challenges.

- Interviewees gave very high marks to the ePMA Helpdesk (average score of 4.5), commenting that the responsiveness and effectiveness of Helpdesk staff were impressive. (continued)

- Interviewees found the deployment of the system to be a weak point (average score of 2.9). Laboratory personnel indicated that there was inadequate guidance or requirements from program offices in submitting proposals through the system. Headquarters personnel indicated that they were not adequately prepared to adopt the new system. Some interviewees mentioned technical issues encountered at the beginning of the production test (security, access, etc.).

- Interviewees found their experience with training to be mixed. Many indicated that the timing of training was problematic as it did not coincide with when they would use the system, thereby decreasing effectiveness. Most thought the content of the training was good, although several indicated that the online training, while thorough, seemed excessively long and tedious.

- On average, interviewees found the system functionality to be adequate, and many commented that the enhancements submitted through the software change control process should be very beneficial in making the system easier to use and more intuitive.

- Interviewees struggled with the question of whether the application supported their business needs/processes. Many found the application adequate for submitting proposals, but indicated that they were unsure of what happened to them once they were received by HQ. Both Site Office and Headquarters personnel were unsure what to do with proposals once they were received. Not being able to properly use the eIDK (electronic interface developer's kit) and duplicate submission of proposals through manual procedures also rankled some users. Some commented that the application created more work rather than streamlining it.

- Interviewees addressed the question of communications on two levels, communication between the project team and SAMs and communications between HQ and laboratories. Most respondents felt that the communications from the project team (Webinars, e-mails, etc.) provided good information and updates on the status of the project. They indicated that some communications were inconsistent at different times during the production test. In general, laboratory participants felt that communications from program offices was scarce and inadequate.

The above feedback represents a brief distillation of the wide range of comments received during the PIR. The ePMA project team is still reviewing and analyzing information gathered during the PIR so that appropriate lessons can be applied in planning and executing the project in FY 2006.

The overall outcome of the production test, as captured through the PIR process, can be summarized in a quote from one of the interviewees: "This is such a big undertaking. DOE has tried other things like this in the past and has gotten halfway through and ended. Glad to see this is all the way through. I'm looking forward to the next release." The ePMA project team is committed to delivering a better product to customers and to improving the way in which DOE conducts business.

Feedback Requested!

- We want to hear from you. Help promote ePMA by telling others about the project or pointing them to the project Web site: http://epma.energy.gov.
- Suggest or submit an article for future editions of *Spotlight*.
- Tell us what you think about ePMA. We need your input to successfully enhance and support this first-of-a-kind system.

Contact Jim Fremont, ePMA Communication and Outreach Manager, at james.fremont@ee.doe.gov